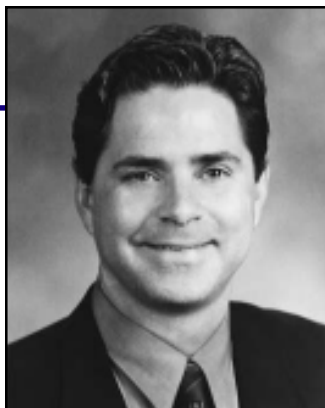


State Representative
Mark Schoesler



State Representative
Larry Sheahan

9th District



1998 Session Update

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

Dear neighbors,

The 1998 legislative session began Jan. 12 with even more excitement than normal. In addition to the usual ceremonies and annual State of the State address by Gov. Gary Locke that mark the first days of session, the opening week featured a speech by United States Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich.

Although the House used part of the first two weeks passing bills that were approved by the House but later killed in the Senate or vetoed by the governor last year, most of our time has been spent in committee meetings listening to testimony on numerous proposals. But we'll soon switch our attention to floor debates and votes, and discussions in caucus on bills. During the floor session stage, we'll spend hours voting on bills that have passed the committee stage. Feb. 17 is the deadline to have House bills passed out of the House chamber. Then we'll begin the whole process again with Senate bills. The last day of the scheduled 60-day session is March 12.

This newsletter covers some of the key issues being addressed this session. If you have questions, comments or concerns about any of the issues being addressed by the Legislature this year, or if you need help in dealing with state government, please contact one of us by phone, mail or e-mail. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

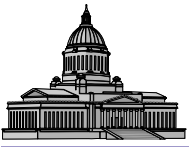
Supplemental budget: What to do with \$860 million surplus?

As usual, one of the most important issues facing the Legislature in a "short" session is approving a supplemental operating budget for the state. The main purpose of a supplemental budget is to adjust projections in spending for state services that have developed since the passage and implementation last year of a two-year budget. Republicans are using a prudent approach in writing the supplemental budget. Criteria have been developed for supplemental budget requests. A budget request will be funded if it is an unanticipated, unmanageable change in an entitlement program

workload or caseload; it corrects a serious technical error in the original appropriation; it deals with an emergency; or it addresses an opportunity that will not be available during the next biennium.

The Legislature has a nice problem on its hands: What to do with a state budget surplus that is \$860 million and growing? The surplus resulted from a strong, diversified economy aided by reduced taxes and a responsible spending policy established by the Legislature. Unlike past years in which legislators were faced with unpleasant decisions like whether to cut state services or raise taxes, we now are in a position to decide whether to increase spending in certain needed areas, place more money in reserve, or provide tax cuts.

(continued on page two)



Rep. Mark Schoesler

Rep. Larry Sheahan

Expect the Legislature to put at least \$500 million into a reserve that would be used in case the state encounters a decline in revenue caused by an economic downturn. It's important to have a sizable amount in reserve, as recent state history has shown. In the late 1970s, the state had a surplus, only to see it disappear when an economic recession hit in the early '80s. In 1990, legislators had a sizable surplus on their hands, but they chose to spend a large portion of it. By 1993, another economic downturn had struck Washington, resulting in a revenue drop that forced then-Gov. Lowry and the Democrat-led Legislature to raise taxes. It's important for the Legislature to learn from these examples and create a healthy surplus. It's also likely that the governor and legislators will agree on several targeted tax cuts to help further boost Washington's economy.

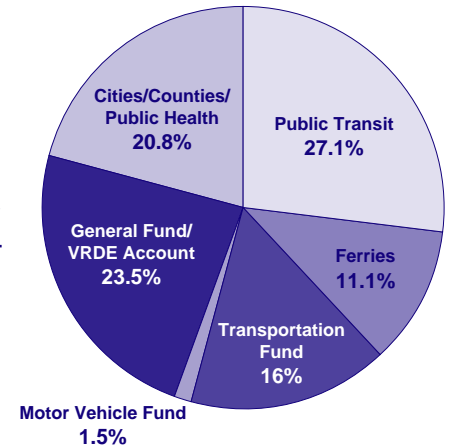
Republican leaders oppose a gas tax increase

While state lawmakers debate how to come up with a long-term transportation funding solution, one thing has been established: Republican leadership has vowed not to increase the gas tax. Other funding sources should first be utilized before resorting to a gas tax increase. One concept that many favor is shifting the portion of the MVET revenue that goes to the state general fund (about \$370 million) to a transportation account for roads and highways. Another proposal would reduce the sales tax on road construction projects. In addition, the results of an audit of the Department of Transportation should be available sometime this month. We'll look at finding hidden costs in road construction. From this audit we hope to find more spending efficiencies for DOT. Our survey showed strong opposition to a gas tax increase, as did Spokane County voters on the local-option proposal.



Republican leaders have vowed to oppose an increase in the gas tax.

Current distribution of MVET revenues by category



Legend (Revenues in Millions)

Public Transit	\$431.0
Ferries	\$176.5
Transportation Fund	\$254.8
Motor Vehicle Fund	\$23.1
General Fund/VRDE Account	\$372.8
Cities / Counties / Public Health	\$330.9
Total	\$1,589.2

License tab fees likely to be lowered

If you own an automobile, there is good news: Your vehicle license tab fees likely will be lowered. The Legislature and the governor agree that the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (which you pay when you renew your license tab fees each year) is too high. The only question is how much to cut the MVET. Republicans are considering various proposals. One would reduce the annual amount of the MVET to 1.5 percent of the value of the vehicle and revise the distribution formula of the tax. This measure would apply to motor vehicle fees due after June 30, 1998. Other MVET-reduction plans surely will surface during session. Meanwhile, the governor has proposed a \$35-per-vehicle reduction.

Continuing our effort to improve schools

Improving Kindergarten-12 education remains a key issue for legislators. The Legislature has worked hard over the past couple of years to ensure that your tax dollars were spent wisely and efficiently on K-12 education. In addition, several proposals to improve schools have been signed into law. These include a measure to improve reading skills for younger students. For students to excel, it is imperative for them to read well.

The Legislature is continuing to deal with accountability for a quality education and higher public school academic performance.

Our education policy embraces the following principles:

- Focus on what works by adopting research-based curricula.
- Support our dedicated, hard-working teachers with more effective, practical university and in-service training that helps them meet specific learning goals.
- Focus on smarter use of education dollars.
- Strengthen the high school diploma so it becomes a meaningful document of student achievement.
- Provide helpful information to parents on their students' education.



Legislators will continue efforts to improve beginning reading skills.

There are a number of education topics before us this session. These include development of an accountability system for K-4 reading, development of a reading initiative aimed at improving beginning reading skills, parents rights, protecting the privacy rights of students, and defining the state "certificate of mastery" required of future high school graduates.

Domestic violence measure introduced

Domestic violence remains a serious problem in our society. Many women are injured and terrorized by their spouses or boyfriends, and some are harassed and injured even after going to court. A bill moving through the House would provide much tougher penalties for domestic violent offenders. HB 2325 would do the following:

- Add all domestic violence felony offenders to the list of convicted offenders who may not be released while awaiting sentencing or the outcome of an appeal.
- Provide for issuance of a no-bail arrest warrant for an accused domestic violence offender who is alleged to have violated a condition of release pending trial.
- Amend the Sentencing Reform Act (SRA) to require the court to sentence felony domestic violence offenders to one year of community placement following release from confinement.
- Amend the SRA to allow prior misdemeanor domestic violence offenses to count as criminal history in determining an offender's score for a current felony domestic violence conviction.

Group homes for juvenile offenders to be scrutinized

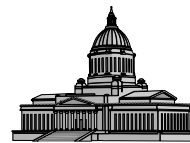
Over the past year, there have been a handful of senseless tragedies involving group homes for juvenile offenders. Last summer, two residents at the Maple Lane juvenile facility in southwest Washington escaped from authorities while attending a Seattle Seahawks game at the Kingdome. They later were charged with burglary and are suspects in the murder of an elderly Spokane woman. In September, a 17-year-old boy escaped from a Lynnwood halfway house for juvenile offenders and later brutally murdered a 12-year-old babysitter in Stanwood. In addition, a counselor at Maple Lane was charged with raping a resident there.

These incidents underscore the need for a complete overhaul of juvenile facilities, or at least improvements in supervision at such facilities. Legislation has been introduced that would impose tighter restrictions on group homes for juvenile offenders.

A complete independent audit is being conducted to examine group homes and see where things have broken down.

Criminal justice funding may be bolstered

For cities and counties, one of the biggest challenges has been to battle crime with small budgets. With that in mind, the Legislature this year is looking to increase criminal justice funding for local governments. A bill has been introduced that would take part of the sales tax that goes to the state general fund and redirect it to criminal justice funding for cities and counties.



In addition, legislators are working to create an emergency fund for smaller counties that would be used if they have an expensive trial. For smaller counties in our state, a lengthy murder case can drain a county's budget.



In 1996, 331 people died on state roads in accidents that involved alcohol.

Several bills proposed to battle drunk driving

Fighting drunk driving has become one of the most important issues for legislators this session. In 1996, 331 people died on state roads in accidents that involved alcohol. Clearly, current laws have not done enough to keep drivers and passengers safe from drunk drivers.

Several bills have been introduced to combat drunk driving. These include:

- Lowering the illegal blood alcohol content (BAC) level from 0.10 percent to 0.08 percent.
- Authorizing impoundment and forfeiture of vehicles operated by individuals with a suspended or revoked driver's license and seizure of vehicles whenever a driver violates DUI laws.
- Requiring a motorist's driver's license to be suspended for 90 days without exception for a first DUI conviction.
- Substantially increasing fines and jail time for people convicted of DUI. The maximum penalty would be one year in prison, a \$2,000 fine and permanent license revocation for a person convicted of DUI who has two or more DUIs within seven years.
- Increasing the sentence of someone convicted of DUI if that person has prior DUIs.

Agricultural tax cuts possible

For many farmers living in counties that lie along the Idaho or Oregon border, it is tempting to cross the state line to buy farm equipment because the sales tax is lower outside of Washington. This has hurt sales for machinery dealers in our state. A measure has been introduced that could persuade farmers to buy such equipment in-state. This proposal would clarify when the sales tax for farm machinery and parts is collected by out-of-state purchasers.

There is another bill that would eliminate the sales tax on livestock veterinary pharmaceuticals and vaccines. Another bill would provide a sales tax exemption on items used to make the transition from the burning to the nonburning of bluegrass. This would help grass growers stay in business in the wake of the recent bans on grass burning. Yet another proposal would reduce the sales tax for seed conditioning, in which seeds are prepared for planting.

WSU-EWU merger issue causes debate

In recent weeks, an issue has emerged that has created plenty of debate: whether Washington State University and Eastern Washington University should be merged. Sen. Jim West, chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, has suggested that Eastern should be merged under WSU in order to save costs. However, 9th District Sen. Eugene Prince and we believe that the two universities should remain separate. The mission of a regional university like Eastern differs from the mission of a research university like WSU. Although EWU has experienced an enrollment decline in recent years, the problems it faces can be fixed without a merger. In addition, we are concerned what the impact of a merger would have on Cheney, where Eastern is located. **We want to hear your views on this matter!** Please contact us in Olympia and let us know whether you think WSU and EWU should merge.



Rep. Sheahan makes a point during House floor debate.

Survey results tallied

Just before Thanksgiving, we mailed a newsletter that included a survey of questions dealing with possible issues before the 1998 Legislature. So far, we've received nearly 1,150 responses, with more coming in each day. We appreciate the time people took to fill out the survey and return it to us. It gives us a good idea of what people think about various issues. Below are results from the surveys returned just prior to the start of session. We hope you find the results interesting.

1 *Would you favor an increase in the state gasoline tax to help fund needed long-term transportation projects?*

Yes — 451 (39.8 percent)

No — 681 (60.2 percent)

2 *If you said yes, how much of an increase would be acceptable? (Please pick one.)*

a) 1-3 cents per gallon — 260 (56.6 percent)

b) 4-6 cents per gallon — 132 (28.8 percent)

c) 7 cents per gallon or more — 67 (14.6 percent)

3 *If it was not possible to shift MVET revenue toward transportation needs, would you support raising the state gasoline tax and lowering the MVET?*

Yes — 505 (46.5 percent)

No — 582 (53.5 percent)

4 *Would you support increasing the local option for gas taxes?*

Yes — 330 (29.7 percent)

No — 781 (70.3 percent)

5 *Would you support a supermajority vote of county commissioners on the local option to raise the gas tax rather than the current vote of the citizens?*

Yes — 141 (12.6 percent)

No — 977 (87.4 percent)

6 *How should we use the state budget surplus?*

a) Place most of it into the "rainy day" reserve account — 246 (23.2 percent)



Rep. Schoesler discusses legislation with Rep. Steve Van Luven, chairman of the House Trade and Economic Development Committee.

b) Give most of it back to citizens as tax cuts — 206 (19.5 percent)

c) Have a balance between using it for the reserve account and for tax cuts — 607 (57.3 percent)

7 *Do you favor an automatic driver's license suspension if a driver is at fault in a fatal collision with a bicyclist or pedestrian?*

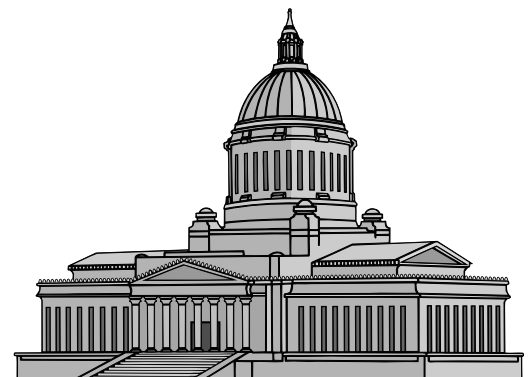
Yes — 474 (42.7 percent)

No — 635 (57.3 percent)

8 *Should motorists be required to take a driving test to prove their competency if they are involved in a traffic accident?*

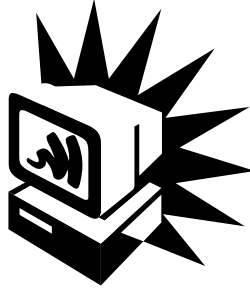
Yes — 334 (30.3 percent)

No — 767 (69.7 percent)



Listen in on the Legislature

Any citizen with a computer with sound system and access to the Internet can listen to all deliberations of the Legislature live. The deliberations are also stored for later access on demand. This service is free and is provided by TVW, the statewide nonprofit television network which is the equivalent of C-SPAN at the national level. Just visit TVW's web site at www.tvw.org. The software required — RealAudio — is also free and can be downloaded over the Internet from www.real.com.



Video town hall meeting planned

On Thursday, Feb. 19, Reps. Schoesler and Sheahan will host a special 9th District town hall meeting through a videoconference hookup provided by Washington Interactive Television (WIT). Reps. Schoesler and Sheahan will be in Olympia and linked to a site on the WSU campus. During the one-hour video meeting, they will discuss the current status of issues before the 1998 Legislature, and will respond to questions and comments from you and others. Please attend this special meeting!

**Where: Room T101, Food Science and Human Nutrition Building
Washington State University, Pullman**

When: 7:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.

• Here is how to contact us •

Rep. Mark Schoesler

402 Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7844

E-mail:
schoesle_ma@leg.wa.gov

House committees:
Agriculture and Ecology,
vice chairman
Finance
Rules
Joint Administrative Rules
Review Committee, *chairman*

Rep. Larry Sheahan

333 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
(360) 786-7942

E-mail:
sheahan_la@leg.wa.gov

House committees:
Appropriations
Higher Education
Law and Justice, *chairman*
Rules

Representative Mark Schoesler
Representative Larry Sheahan
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

9th District
1998
Session Update

BULK RATE
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
Washington State
Department of Printing